Myth No. 9: Oil palm plantations help mitigate climate change through the production of agrodiesel

The expansion of oil palm plantations usually takes place at the expense of transforming natural ecosystems, particularly tropical rainforests. This has disastrous consequences, firstly because these forests are the home of very traditional peoples who have learnt over thousands of years to understand the forest and to use it, respecting its natural dynamics. Secondly, the destruction of the forest implies the release of carbon dioxide (CO_2) – one of the greenhouse effect gases, whose accumulation in the atmosphere is responsible for global warming and subsequently climate change. Moreover, if a comparative assessment of CO_2 is made between the two systems (forests and plantations), it will be seen that tropical forests, because of their complexity, store and absorb much more carbon than plantations.

Oil palm plantations, like any large scale monoculture plantation, demand many inputs based on carbon-releasing fossil fuels. They also require agrotoxics because of the many pests and diseases that affect them, as well as chemical herbicides to control any species of plants other than oil palm that may compete for water and nutrients. All this produces another carbon imbalance, added to the fact that the agrodiesel fuel produced from palm oil is usually intended for export and the process of transportation required generates further CO_2 emissions.

It is possible that European consumers using palm oil or agrodiesel fuel produced in a tropical country may have the feeling that they are using an “ecological” or “green” fuel. But they ignore the fact that this fuel has travelled from the other side of the world, burning fossil fuels during its voyage and, what is even more serious, destroying the way of life of hundreds of local communities and natural ecosystems.

For all these reasons, oil palm plantations for agrodiesel fuel not only worsen climate change but also have a negative impact on the ecosystems and communities where they are established.

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